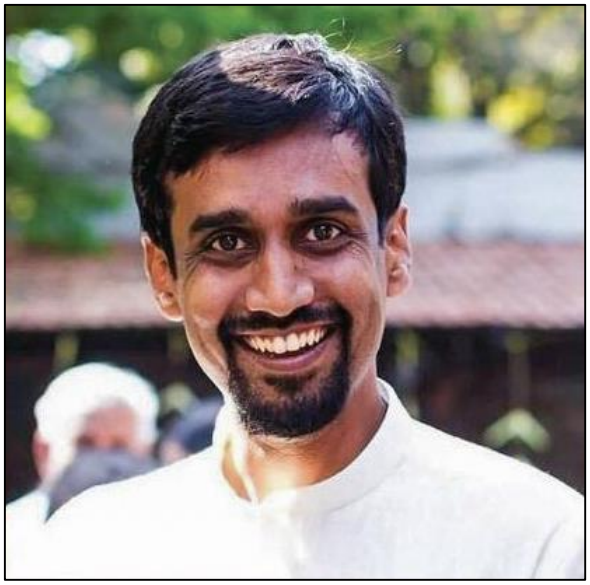
PITTA

Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 19 Number 3 March 2022

THERE ARE MORE PARROTS IN HEAVEN

JVD Moorty



Deccan Birders has lost a passionate birder, a dear friend and dedicated naturalist and Life Member.

D. AVINANDAN passed away in the early hours of March 17, 2022.

Avi, as he was so fondly known, had been a member of the Deccan Birders for two decades and an extremely active one too.

I first met Avi on our field trip to ICRISAT in the year 2000. His immense curiosity and keen observation and his sharp incisive questions had the all birders cogitating satisfactory answers. He was a very warm, welcoming and kind person with an immensely positive outlook on life and a fundamental faith in humanity. His candour could always put everyone at ease and there wasn't a person who did not feel a rapport with him. He loved to talk birds and more so, parrots; and his one-liners never failed to raise a laugh.

As a committed environmentalist and a passionate wildlife lover this passion for nature led him to being involved in parrots and honoured by being named the India representative of the World Parrot Trust. This love for parrots he shared with everyone, be it young or old, he came into contact with.

I vividly recall how field trips with him were something to enjoy, where his *joie de vivre* always brought smiles to the birders at the end of an exhausting day of birding. He always evoked the admiration of his fellow-birders. He was never frugal with his pleasant comments and a smile that reached his ever-twinkling eyes. Till his last day on this mortal world, he felt for and loved his Deccan Birders.

May his soul find eternal peace.

Goodbye, Avi!

FIELD TRIP: Sunday, 3rd April 2022: Nehru Zoological Park, 6.00AM. Trip Coordinator: Surekha Aitabathula (Mobile: 9949038532.

One of the largest Zoos in India, NZP sits next to the 200 year old Mir Alam Tank. Spread over 380 acres and housing 1500 species of birds and reptiles put together, the Zoo has always been a reliable birding destination for us. One can see Flycatchers, Bitterns, Thick-knees and many other species.

This will be a half-day trip. Carry water and breakfast/snacks. Strict Covid protocols will be followed, so please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Members are requested to wear their Deccan Birders ID cards. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty.

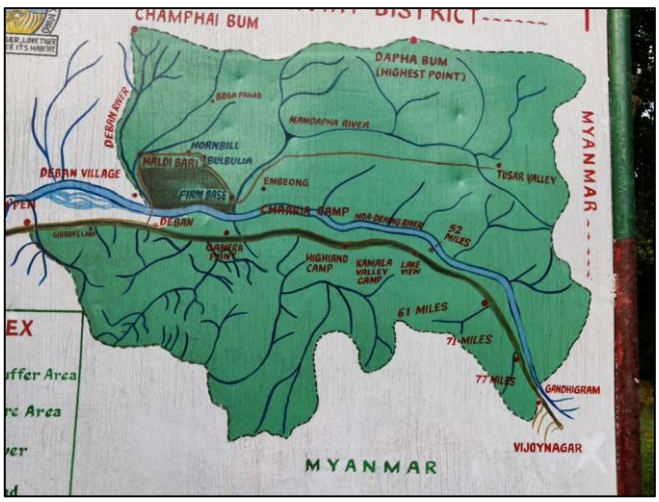
BIRDING IN THE MISHMI HILLS
Trip Report: Arunachal Pradesh, Sep 24 – Oct 01, 2021

Text: Dr Jayati Mitra; Photos: Dr Jayati Mitra (unless otherwise specified)

The venue of the Namdapha Butterfly Meet (Photo: A Surekha)

Arunachal Pradesh being the easternmost state in India is not only the first to witness the sunrise in the country but it is also the greatest biodiversity hotspot of this region. After a long break due to the pandemic, parts of the country were opening up to travellers again. Therefore Surekha and I decided to attend a Butterfly Meet at Namdapha forest in the last week of September 2021.

The entry point to the state was a small town named Miao from where our journey started. Our destination was a village called Deban, situated amidst the Namdapha reserve forest area and very close to the gently flowing Noa-Dehing River, and surrounded by pristine grassland, trees and hills. The observance of the butterflies and the whole experience of staying there was a treat in itself, but that is a separate chapter in this story. From here we decided to continue our journey, further north into the region called Mishmi Hills, which is a bird watching hotspot of our country.



A map of the region (Photo: A Surekha)

When we arrived here, the monsoon was still active in this region and it was not yet time for migrant birds to arrive, but our objective was to pay a short visit and observe the species of birds which are mostly residents of this area. Our journey started from Deban, which is situated in the Changlang district bordering Myanmar. We decided to travel up north via Wakro in Lohit district, then to Roing in the Lower Dibang Valley district, and finally to Mayodia Pass in the Upper Dibang Valley district. The Mishmi Hills, named after the Mishmi tribe, extend southwards from the Himalayan mountain range and this region, the Lower and Upper Dibang Valley districts in Arunachal Pradesh are a part of it. In this short journey we decided to travel across an altitude ranging from 185m to 2655m, and covering different types of vegetation, to get an idea about the distribution of avifauna of this region.

White Wagtail

Namdapha forest is home to five species of hornbills, and our first bird sightings started at Deban itself. The common visitors in the early mornings were the Eurasian Hoopoe and White Wagtail. The muddy pathways were flanked by a few tall trees, locally known as Hollong (*Dipterocarpus retusus*), conspicuous with their long straight trunks and dense foliage of oblong leaves concentrated at the crown. This tree is highly valued for its timber and has been declared as an endangered species.

Wreathed Hornbill

The slopes were populated by bamboo thickets through which the white blooms of wild ginger showed up frequently. We were very excited to see a few Great Hornbills and Wreathed Hornbills here, but could not find the rare and endangered Brown Hornbill. I was lucky enough to get a glimpse of a pair of White-tailed Flycatchers, the male having a deep blue and the female a dull brown plumage.

Our birding guide, Ravi, picked us up at Deban in the morning and, after a long drive, we reached the Golden Pagoda amidst the Tenga Pani region in the afternoon.

Golden Pagoda

Only Common Mynas and Rock Pigeons were visible around the manicured lawns of this place, and it was almost evening when we arrived at the fringe areas of the Kamlang forest division.

My first sighting of wild birds started here with two small inconspicuous ones, the Buff-chested and Spot-breasted Babblers, the latter having a plumage with a brown shade and very faint streaks on its neck. They apparently were very restless and disappeared within seconds after our sighting. The surrounding vegetation was too thick and posed a real challenge for birdwatching, and the best view we could get was that of a flock of Pin-striped Tit Babblers in a bush at our eye level.

Pin-striped Tit Babbler

Some other birds present in the background were Blue-bearded Bee-eaters and Black Drongos. We realized that the best way to bird here is to learn and identify the calls of the birds and then try to follow the direction of the call to spot them. As dusk approached, we halted for the night at a pre-reserved homestay in a small town called Wakro.

Our hostess belonged to the Mishmi tribe and treated us to a very special dinner with dishes prepared with bamboo, lemongrass and some other regional spices. She was the head of the family and took care of the children, and at the same time she supervised the men at work in her farm full of paddy fields. As I looked around the dining hall my gaze dwelled on a row of stuffed animal heads displayed at the corner. Upon enquiry we came to know that these were from the Mithuns (*Bos frontalis*), local domesticated animals which had been sacrificed during religious and family rituals. Throughout our short stay we happened to see quite a few of these animals grazing freely in the region.

Puff-throated Babbler

Grey-backed Shrike

Early next morning, I strolled around in the nearby area to watch birds. There were Eurasian Tree Sparrows, Oriental Magpie Robin and Puff-throated Babblers (*P. r. mandellii* subspecies) around the corner of the street. Grey-backed Shrikes were a very common sight here.

Scarlet Minivet

We drove down further towards the forest and stopped near a stream. There were Scarlet Minivets, a Green-billed Malkoha and a Dollarbird all moving inside the canopy of a huge tree, but all looked drab against the cloudy background. After some time there was sunshine for a while. Our guide pointed out to a pretty Rufous-throated Fulvetta. I noted its brown head with a black crown stripe, bold white eyebrows and a distinct brown ring around its neck. It happened to be the first lifer of the day for me, and I cheered up and moved towards the flowing water.

Black-backed Forktail

Maroon Oriole

Among the rocks, a Black-backed Forktail was foraging. The other species seen around were Maroon Oriole, Pin-tailed Green Pigeon and Asian Barred Owlet. The White Wagtails were gradually increasing in number as the days passed by from the day we arrived here – apparently they were slowly moving down the hills in large numbers, as winter was about to set in. Along the roadside, I heard the calls of a Hooded Pitta and waited for a long time searching for it but was not lucky enough to find it.

Parasuram Kund

After breakfast we left for Roing. While we were on our way, it started raining heavily, and we had to skip the idea of birding at Parasuram Kund, a scenic spot along the bank of the Lohit River. Legend has it that the sage Parasuram took a dip here to wash away his sins, and a temple stands here to this date. We had a view of it from the bridge and could see the foamy breakers rolling across the rocks jutting out of the river near the bank. The intensity of the rain subsided as we climbed up a scenic bend around the Lohit River. From this viewpoint the floodplains below were visible, and it was a beautiful sight.

The floodplains (Photo: A Surekha)

A little down the road, we heard plenty of birdsong and stepped out of the vehicle. The path was lined with broad-leaved trees and blue hills rose against the horizon. There were Great and Blue-throated Barbets, Lesser Yellownape and Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpeckers, and Striated Bulbuls there, all focused on feeding.

Oriental White-eye

Nepal Fulvetta

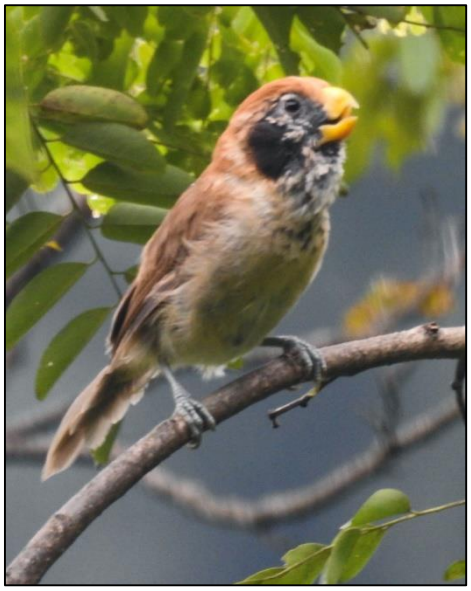
Despite the drizzle we strolled along and could find a big hunting flock of chirping birds, all of which were tiny and colourful. There were flocks of Oriental White-eyes, Nepal Fulvettas and even Common Mynas, but some of them were strikingly beautiful.

Golden Babbler

Silver-eared Mesia

The Golden Babblers were bright golden yellow in colour with fine black streaks on the head and a black patch around the eye. The Silver-eared Mesias, also belonging to the Babbler family, had bright silver ears and a black head contrasting with orange underparts and a bright red wing patch which looked very colourful when they were flying around. Here I also saw a flock of Rufous-faced Warblers, identified by the prominent brown patch visible on the face which distinguished them from the other members of this family.

Rufous-faced Warbler



Spot-breasted Parrotbill

A little later I saw what seemed to be the most significant sighting of the morning, a Spot-breasted Parrotbill. I had never seen this species before and watched it feeding with its beak which was very large, conical and stout as compared to the size of the bird's head! I enjoyed watching it from all angles. Finally we headed towards Teju, the nearest district town, to have lunch.

In the afternoon we visited Jia grassland, a marshy area with a river flowing through it, and surrounded by grass so tall and dense that our path became obstructed as we tried to move through it to the other side. At the entrance I saw the half-hidden face of a Red-billed Scimitar Babbler against the dense vegetation. I precariously walked through the swamp, watching every step, and near the water found several Little Egrets and Cormorants, and huge flocks of Scaly-breasted Munias. There were many Sand Martins in flight, and their bellies glistened like silver in the afternoon sunshine. I could find a few Yellow-bellied Prinias and Siberian Stonechats, which mostly hid inside the grass. I was really happy to see a Jerdon's Babbler, which seemed like a Yellow-eyed Babbler at first, before I noted the black eyes surrounded by a pale white ring around them. We spent some more time looking all around but could find only Red-vented Bulbuls. Gradually we left the spot and drove towards Roing, the district town of Lower Dibang Valley.

Another evening was drawing near as we reached the market place of the town. We purchased all essential food and other items for our stay for two nights at Frogmouth Camp a little ahead of the town. This was an uninhabited area and was situated along the National Highway 313.The stillness of the night and the pitch dark sky dotted with stars seemed so peaceful after a long hectic journey. We sat down and simply relaxed, gazing all around the spot. All of a sudden the generator started with a bang and pulled me out of my reverie. I realized that I was very hungry and soon after was satiated with a tasty meal.

Next morning we were ready at sunrise and eagerly looked forward to our trip to Mayodia Pass. The altitude had been slowly increasing and the weather was cold and cloudy. As we got our first sighting of the day, the Long-tailed Sibia, in flight near the camp, I understood that this would be a great day of birding for me as most of the species were endemic to the eastern Himalayan region and I had never visited this area before. This was the continuation of NH 313 and the birding spots were described by our guide as kilometers from the beginning of the road to define them. At 17km we saw the Sultan Tit, which is an early riser – this pretty bird with a yellow crest and belly contrasting with its black wings is a familiar sight here. A little later a Black-throated Prinia entertained us for a while, but it soon moved down the steep ravine to forage and I lost my view of it. I looked around carefully only to realise that the steep mountains on one side and the deep ravine on the other side of the road would make our birding rather difficult. Right in front of us, three Chestnut-bellied Nuthatches were swiftly climbing up the thick trunk of an old tree.

Small Niltava

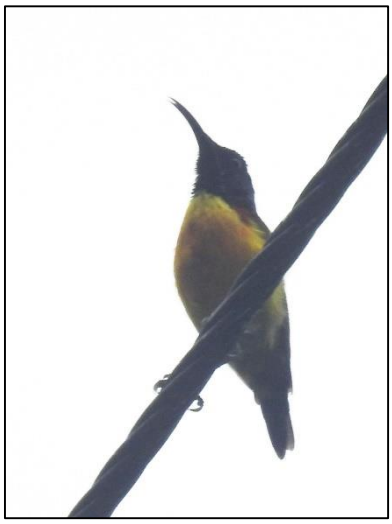
In the distance we saw two blue birds, a Small Niltava and a Verditer Flycatcher. Suddenly a Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill appeared and flew multiple times across the road, enabling us to get a good view.

Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill

White-naped Yuhina

We moved towards Tiwarigaon and saw a White-naped Yuhina. Here we halted for breakfast. At this point a wailing sound was heard and, as it grew louder and louder, our guide told us to look for the Hoolock Gibbons who were out looking for food. They were very far away but we did catch a glimpse of the face which was marked with distinct white eyebrows. This is the only species of ape in our country but due to habitat destruction it has become critically endangered.

Fire-breasted Flowerpecker (female)



Green-tailed Sunbird

Later as we moved on, we could hear the roaring sound of water as we approached a place called Chekopani. Many birds were there in this area, including a Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Green-tailed Sunbird and a beautiful pair of Scarlet Finches.

Yellow-throated Fulvetta

Most of the birds were at a great distance and the weather was cloudy, thus hampering the proper sighting of the beautiful shades of their plumage – but for one Yellow-throated Fulvetta, which came very close and I could see the prominent eyebrow and a splash of yellow on its underbelly. A Large Niltava, a juvenile, was yet to develop the bright blue feathers over its body.

Large Niltava (juvenile)

Rusty-fronted Barwing

Streak-throated Barwing

Next we happened to come across a beautiful group of birds called the Barwings. These birds are confined to the eastern Himalayan region and we saw two types of them. The Rusty-fronted had a white belly, very fine greyish lines on its wings and a rufous chin and orange face, whereas the Streak-throated had brown underparts, greyish brown streaks on throat and breast, and black and tan barring on its wings. The birds were pecking on the moss-laden trunks, probably trying to find insects under them.

Another beautiful bird which appeared there was the Chestnut-crowned Warbler, a tiny sparrow-sized bird with a rufous head and yellow belly.

Chestnut-crowned Warbler

White-capped Water Redstart

By this time we had reached the bridge across the waterfalls where a White-capped Water Redstart was seen on a boulder beneath the tumbling waters gushing down the hills. After crossing over, we found a few Beautiful Sibias feeding and flying all over the place.

Beautiful Sibia

But what caught our attention was a unique deep brown bird with scales all over its body, especially the underbelly and a triangular bill – it was a Manipur Wedge-billed Babbler, endemic to this region.

Manipur Wedge-billed Babbler

After this we got to see another rare species, the Ward's Trogon. I saw the female with a brown back whose underbelly was yellow in contrast with the pink of the male. The tail was long with serially-arranged deep round black-and-white patches on the inner surface. The eyes had a purplish blue ring with a captivating gaze. I stared at this beautiful bird perched on a nearby tree till the rumbling sound of an approaching vehicle made it fly away.

Ward-'s Trogon (female)

By now we had almost reached Mayodia Pass, and very soon we halted in front of a signboard showing the name and altitude of that place. We descended from the vehicle and started walking, trying to locate the spot from where some loud chirping sounds were coming.

Whiskered Yuhina

Stripe-throated Yuhina

There was a small shrub which supported multiple species foraging together: Whiskered and Stripe-throated Yuhinas, Lemon-rumped Warbler, Ashy-throated Warbler, Rufous-bellied Niltava, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher and Chestnut-tailed Minla, to name a few. I watched the Yuhinas move around repeatedly from one tree to another in big flocks and again settle down together at another suitable spot.

Ashy-throated Warbler

Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher

At this place we dined at a small make-shift eatery and couldn't move any further upwards as road construction work hindered our movement. I learnt that this road passes through a small village called Hunli further towards the district town Anini, which is the last township near the Indian border with China. The Dibang River, a tributary of the Brahmaputra, after which this district is named, also originates here. We had realized by this time that this is a very bird-rich habitat and requires quite a long stay to watch and study all the different species. In this short span we just got an idea about a few species and were very happy with what we had seen and learnt during this visit.

Golden-breasted Fulvetta

On our return journey, a few kilometers downwards there was a prominent area where stood an old style building called Coffee House. The place also provided basic accommodation and simple food for a stay during the night. Around this place we saw a Golden-breasted Fulvetta, a brightly coloured bird with a yellow belly contrasting with its black head and orange and yellow patches on the wing. There was also a Black-throated Parrotbill and a Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler. The latter was a small brown bird with an unusually long curved bill, bigger in size than its head and resembling a scythe.

Black-throated Parrotbill

Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler

Our guide suddenly pointed towards a thick trunk covered with moss and thick vegetation. The spot was dark and I tried to scan all over and finally found the fluffy ball like creature with pink legs and long toes moving with a rolling motion inside a deep crevice present in the trunk - it was a Bar-winged Wren Babbler! The fine lines of grey and white on the wings, contrasting with the brown back and black head covered with white spots, was one of the most delicately-patterned birds I have ever seen. I was so happy to see this bird although the dark surroundings was not amenable for photography. A little later I spotted the Manipur Fulvetta, another endemic bird very special to this region. As luck would have it my battery got exhausted as I tried to click a photograph, but the image of the bird is deeply etched in my mind. This bird resembled the White-browed Fulvetta but without the prominent white brow. We also saw a Collared Scops Owl hidden in the dense foliage, which flew off on our arrival.

As the crimson sun was setting against the horizon, we heard the sounds of some nocturnal birds. There was a Mountain Scops Owl calling. We waited beneath a huge tree for it to come near but it was getting darker with no sign of the bird. Our guide tried to trace it and suggested we look for it with a flashlight. The call was still audible and in the deep silence we saw the grey figure of the bird approach towards us and disappear amidst the canopy. We were unsuccessful in locating it with a flashlight. I felt a little disappointed but suddenly the scanning light landed upon something quite unexpected.

Hodgson's Frogmouth

It was a very special nocturnal bird, the Hodgson's Frogmouth. Our patience had been rewarded with this rare view. I happily returned to the camp soon after carrying loads of beautiful memories of these wonderful creations of nature at Mayodia Pass.

Next morning we headed downwards towards the 10km point for our last bit of birdwatching before leaving the region. There were Red-whiskered Bulbuls and Square-tailed Drongo Cuckoos perched up on the cables.

Red-whiskered Bulbul

I waited patiently to look for birds across the ravine from where the calls were coming. It was a day for the small Babblers. I saw the White-hooded Babbler but while watching through the binoculars, the bird was replaced by something having an orange-brown head – a Lesser Rufous-headed Parrotbill. It was much smaller in size and the beak was lighter in comparison with the Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill which we had seen earlier.

Lesser Rufous-headed Parrotbill

The Grey-throated Babbler and the White-browed Scimitar Babbler were also present, but all were very far away. I also saw a pair of Bay Woodpeckers in flight, and some Ashy Bulbuls at great heights on the steep slope.

Black-winged Cuckooshrike

In a shrub on the edge of the road there was a Black-winged Cuckooshrike and an Emerald Dove, but the only bird which came out in the open was a Yellow-bellied Warbler, which had a prominent golden breast and an equally bright eyebrow. It was merrily feeding away when we returned to the camp.

Yellow-bellied Warbler

Subsequently we had breakfast and left for Tinsukia in Assam. On our way we saw a few Scarlet Minivets and a beautiful male Orange-bellied Leafbird. There were some trees lined on this stretch of the road on which the birds were found, and these had long slender branches covered with oppositely-arranged large spreading leaves. I came to know that it is locally called Khokan (*Duabanga grandiflora*) and it is used for constructing houses.

Khokan (*Duabanga grandiflora*)

It was necessary now to drive continuously to reach the plains of Assam by evening. Near about sunset we reached Maguri Beel, a water body well known for winter migratory birds, but it was not the season for them yet. Still we went around a little on the grassy fringes, and were delighted to spot a Chestnut-capped Babbler amidst the tall grass.

Chestnut-capped Babbler

We also saw the Striated Grassbird, Common Stonechat and a Common Sandpiper among the marshes. The day ended with the sighting of a flock of Swamp Francolins moving towards their roosting site. We then retired to our hotel at Tinsukia.

Swamp Francolin

Due to the advancement of our return flight from Dibrugarh, we had to abandon the plans of birding the next morning and had to skip the visit to Barikuri Village to watch Hoolock Gibbons. Instead, we headed straight to Dibrugarh airport and back home. The trip was over but memories linger for ever – I still would like to revisit this place again in another season and watch the birds of this region all over again.

The full list of birds seen is given below:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Spotted Dove	*Streptopelia chinensis*	11	Buff-chested Babbler	*Cyanoderma ambiguum*
2	Pin-tailed Green Pigeon	*Treron apicauda*	12	Rufous-throated Fulvetta	*Schoeniparus rufogularis*
3	Green-billed Malkoha	*Phaenicophaeus tristis*	13	Puff-throated Babbler	*Pellorneum ruficeps*
4	Square-tailed Drongo Cuckoo	*Surniculus lugubris*	14	Spot-throated Babbler	*Pellorneum albiventre*
5	Asian Barred Owlet	*Glaucidium cuculoides*	15	Black-backed Forktail	*Enicurus immaculatus*
6	Wreathed Hornbill	*Rhyticeros undulatus*	16	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*
7	Oriental Dollarbird	*Eurystomus orientalis*	17	White Wagtail	*Motacilla alba*
8	Maroon Oriole	*Oriolus traillii*	18	Great Barbet	*Psilopogon virens*
9	Grey-backed shrike	*Lanius tephronotus*	19	Blue-throated Barbet	*Psilopogon asiaticus*
10	Grey Treepie	*Dendrocitta formosae*	20	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
21	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*	64	Nepal Fulvetta	*Alcippe nipalensis*
22	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*	65	Striated Laughingthrush	*Grammatoptila striata*
23	Red-whiskered Bulbul	*Pycnonotus jocosus*	66	Long-tailed Sibia	*Heterophasia picaoides*
24	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*	67	Beautiful Sibia	*Heterophasia pulchella*
25	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*	68	Streak-throated Barwing	*Sibia waldeni*
26	Chestnut Munia	*Lonchura atricapilla*	69	Chestnut-tailed Minla	*Chrysominla strigula*
27	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	*Passer montanus*	70	Dark-sided Flycatcher	*Muscicapa sibirica*
28	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	71	Large Niltava	*Niltava grandis*
29	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	72	Small Niltava	*Niltava macgrigoriae*
30	Yellow-bellied Prinia	*Prinia flaviventris*	73	Rufous-bellied Niltava	*Niltava sundara*
31	Paddyfield Warbler	*Acrocephalus agricola*	74	Verditer Flycatcher	*Eumyias thalassinus*
32	Striated Grassbird	*Megalurus palustris*	75	Blue Whistling Thrush	*Myophonus caeruleus*
33	Jerdon's Babbler	*Chrysomma altirostre*	76	White-capped Water Redstart	*Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*
34	Siberian Stonechat	*Saxicola maurus*	77	Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush	*Monticola rufiventris*
35	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*	78	Streaked Spiderhunter	*Arachnothera magna*
36	Hodgson's Frogmouth	*Batrachostomus hodgsoni*	79	Scarlet Finch	*Haematospiza sipahi*
37	Collared Scops Owl	*Otus bakkamoena*	80	Asian Emerald Dove	*Chalcophaps indica*
38	Hooded Pitta (call)	*Pitta sordida*	81	Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker	*Dendrocopos macei*
39	Red-headed Trogon (call)	*Harpactes erythrocephalus*	82	Bay Woodpecker	*Blythipicus pyrrhotis*
40	Ward's Trogon	*Harpactes wardi*	83	Black-winged Cuckooshrike	*Lalage melaschistos*
41	Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	*Dendrocopos canicapillus*	84	White-throated Fantail	*Rhipidura albicollis*
42	Lesser Yellownape	*Picus chlorolophus*	85	Striated Bulbul	*Pycnonotus striatus*
43	Scarlet Minivet	*Pericrocotus flammeus*	86	Ashy Bulbul	*Hemixos flavala*
44	Sultan Tit	*Melanochlora sultanea*	87	Grey-hooded Warbler	*Seicercus xanthoschistos*
45	Black-throated Prinia	*Prinia atrogularis*	88	Yellow-bellied Warbler	*Abroscopus superciliaris*
46	Ashy-throated Warbler	*Abrornis maculipennis*	89	Rufous-faced Warbler	*Abroscopus albogularis*
47	Buff-barred Warbler	*Abrornis pulcher*	90	Lesser Rufous-headed Parrotbill	*Chleuasicus atrosuperciliaris*
48	Lemon-rumped Warbler	*Abrornis chloronotus*	91	Golden Babbler	*Cyanoderma chrysaeum*
49	Chestnut-crowned Warbler	*Cettia major*	92	Red-billed Scimitar Babbler	*Pomatorhinus ochraceiceps*
50	Golden-breasted Fulvetta	*Lioparus chrysotis*	93	White-browed Scimitar Babbler	*Pomatorhinus schisticeps*
51	Brown-throated Fulvetta	*Fulvetta ludlowi*	94	White-hooded Babbler	*Gampsorhynchus rufulus*
52	Streak-throated Fulvetta	*Fulvetta cinereiceps*	95	Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch	*Sitta castanea*
53	Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill	*Psittiparus ruficeps*	96	Chestnut-capped Babbler	*Timalia pileata*
54	Black-throated Parrotbill	*Paradoxornis flavirostris*	97	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*
55	Striated Yuhina	*Yuhina castaniceps*	98	Swamp Francolin	*Francolinus gularis*
56	Whiskered Yuhina	*Yuhina flavicollis*	99	Sand Martin	*Riparia riparia*
57	White-naped Yuhina	*Yuhina bakeri*	100	Olive-backed Pipit	*Anthus hodgsoni*
58	Stripe-throated Yuhina	*Yuhina gularis*	101	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*
59	Rufous-capped Babbler	*Cyanoderma ruficeps*	102	Rusty-fronted Barwing	*Actinodura egertoni*
60	Bar-winged Wren Babbler	*Spelaeornis troglodytoides*	103	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*
61	Grey-throated Babbler	*Stachyris nigriceps*	104	Orange-bellied Leafbird	*Chloropsis hardwickii*
62	Manipur Wedge-billed Babbler	*Sphenocichla roberti*	105	Fire-breasted Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum ignipectus*
63	Yellow-throated Fulvetta	*Schoeniparus cinereus*			

BUTTERFLY COUNTRY

Trip Report: Arunachal Pradesh, Sep 24 – Oct 01, 2021

Text and Photos: A Surekha

A country landscape at Roing

The astounding designs and the rich pigments on a butterfly are, for want of a better word, astonishing and totally gapeworthy! Some birders incidentally branch out to become butterfliers simply because they are unable to resist the superlative visual attraction of the butterfly that flits across in their birding path.

It is a happy development that butterfliers and butterfly societies and parks are gradually making their presence felt in Hyderabad. If anyone is looking for a good reason to get into butterfly conservation, I would say simply because on an average, a butterfly's lifespan is only two weeks. Such a short lifespan! Sounds almost unfair. Doesn't the butterfly deserve just two weeks of safe and peaceful life? Strong enough reason to get into butterfly conservation, I would say!

One of the best butterfly destinations in India, Namdapha in the Changlang District of Arunachal Pradesh, is the largest protected biodiversity hotspot of the Eastern Himalayas. Little surprise then that Dr Jayati Mitra and I signed up for the fourth edition of the Namdapha Butterfly Meet 2021.

Namdapha National Park is a large protected area covering 1,985 sq km, with more than 1,000 floral and about 1,400 faunal species. It also harbours extensive Dipterocarp forests – a term that refers to any forest in which the dominant species of trees are members of the family Dipterocarpaceae.

Around 410 species out of the 1300-odd butterflies of India are found in Namdapha National Park. The park harbours a rich biodiversity of flora and fauna. Brown Gorgon, Yellow Gorgon, Saffron, Yellow Vein Lancer, Zigzag Flat and Tailed Sulphur are some of the significant species found in Namdapha.

Stellaria aquatica

Melastoma sp

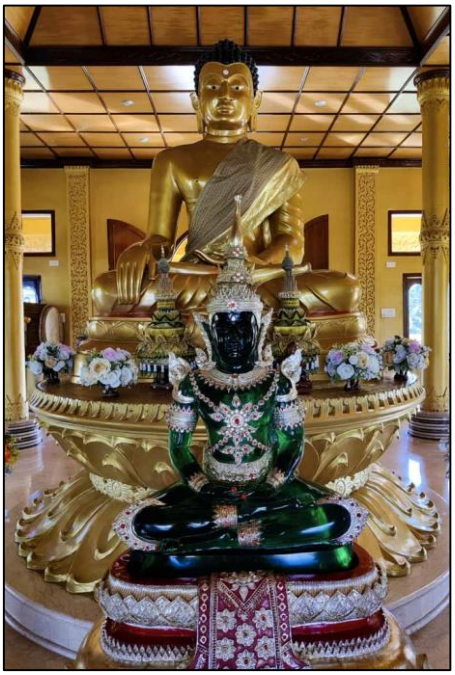
Mithun

Another highlight of Namdapha is a bovine species, the Mithun. The 'Mithun', meaning 'cattle of the mountain', is intricately related to the mythology of Arunachal Pradesh. It is much revered and is an essential part of the religious festivals of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The Mithun is sacrificed in religious ceremonies as a ritual offering, and the ownership of Mithun is considered a sign of prosperity.

During our stay there, on most days we would cut across the Namdapha National Park on foot, sometimes doing a 12km round trip. When it was time to leave Namdapha National Park, I thought to myself, "No, this is not a National Park, it is a sacred seat of learning. It is a veritable University that offers you enormous knowledge about nature and its wonderful creatures. All you need to do is be ready to learn."

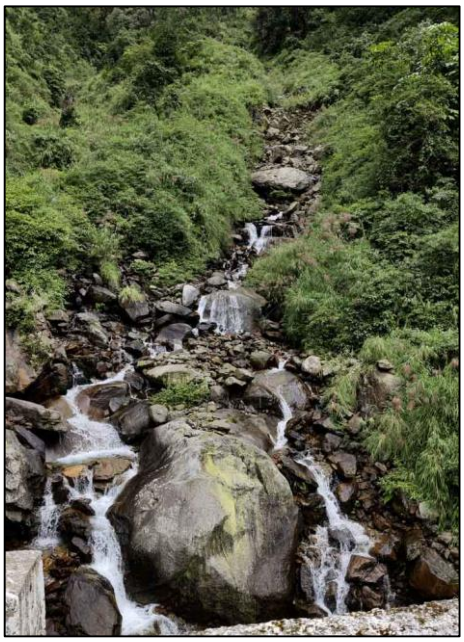
Golden Pagoda

We had also been told repeatedly by one and all that we must not miss the Golden Pagoda, so we dutifully visited this splendid Buddhist Temple, built in Burmese-style architecture. The Golden Pagoda is located in Namsai District of Arunachal Pradesh along the banks of River Teang. It houses a bronze Buddha modelled after Kala Buddha of Nalanda archive. The 20-hectare expanse of the temple complex houses another Buddha statue made of cane, a meditation centre, a crafts emporium and a library.



Magnificent Buddha statues at the Golden Pagoda

A view of River Teang



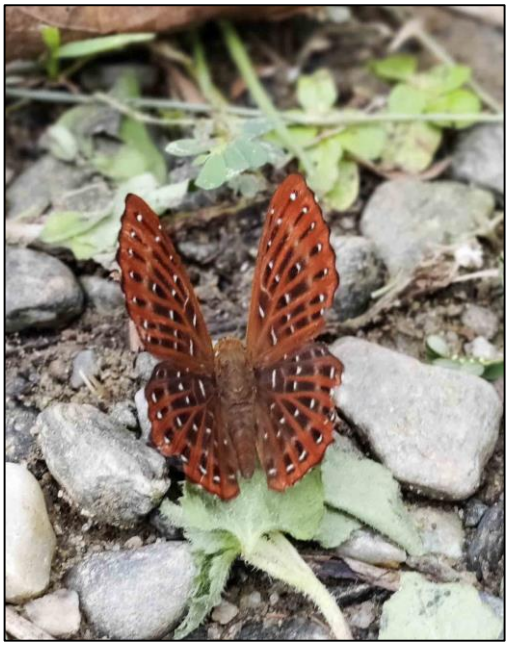
A waterfall near Mayodia Pass

After butterflying to our heart's content at Namdapha, we moved to Mayodia Pass, located about 56km from Roing town in Arunachal Pradesh with an elevation of 2,655 m above sea level. The name '*Mayodia*' is a combination of two Idu-Mishmi words – '*mayu',* which is the name of the mountain, and '*dia*' meaning 'peak of the mountain'. It is a major domestic tourist attraction for the snow fall it receives during winters.

Common Map

Common Maplet

Himalayan Spot Puffin



Punchinello

We saw quite a number of butterfly species here as we walked along the steeply climbing *ghat* road. The view of the silent and massive mountains with rivers snaking through them is simply stupendous.

Courtesan

Striped Punch

Happy butterfliers after spotting the Striped Punch

Our next stop was along the Dihing River. The river Brahmaputra is known by the name Dihing in Arunachal. It enters India from the west through Sadiya town in Arunachal Pradesh. The 380km-long Dihing originates at 7,792 feet above sea level in the Patkai Hills of Arunachal Pradesh, and flows through Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts in Assam to its confluence with the Brahmaputra at Dihingmukh.

A view at Mishmi Hills

After Dihing, the next splendid mountain view presented to us came as we rode to Mishmi Hills, located at the north-eastern tip of India. These hills occur at the junction of the North-eastern Himalaya and the Indo-Burma ranges. Here the Himalayan arc takes a sharp turn and meets the Indo-Burma ranges. Some of our campmates found the Bhutan Glory butterfly here – the ultimate on any butterflier's wishlist.

The entry to Roing

We halted for the night at Roing town, the District Headquarters of Lower Dibang Valley. Roing is the last major town at the north-eastern frontier of India.

A scene near Roing

Common Jester

Paris Peacock

Participants at the Butterfly Meet

The conclusion we came to, at the end of this marvellous trip, is that there are butterflies everywhere in Arunachal Pradesh. Butterflies have made their home in Arunachal Pradesh, which is also known as the Land of the Rising Sun. The sun is in effect the lifegiver to the butterfly, because its cold wings from overnight are not flight ready unless they soak up the sun every morning. The stunning beauty and the staggering colours of the butterfly totally justify their collective noun – a kaleidoscope of butterflies!

A full list of butterflies seen during the trip is given below:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Blue Tiger	*Tirumala limniace*	34	Striped Blue Crow	*Euploea mulciber*
2	Tufted Ace	*Sebastonima dolopia*	35	Magpie Crow	*Euploea radamanthus*
3	Chestnut Bob	*Lambrix salsala*	36	Pallid Nawab	*Polyura arja*
4	Tiger Hopper	*Ochus subvittatus*	37	Tawny Rajah	*Charaxes barnardus*
5	Glassy Bluebottle	*Graphium colanthus*	38	Medus Brown	*Orsotriaena medus*
6	Great Jay	*Graphium eurypylus*	39	Red Lacewing	*Cethosia bibilis*
7	Veined Jay	*Graphium chironides*	40	Large Yeoman	*Cirrochroa aoris*
8	Five Bar Swordtail	*Graphium antiphates*	41	Staff Sergeant	*Athyma selenophora*
9	Lesser Zebra	*Graphium macareus*	42	Clear Sailer	*Neptis clinia*
10	Common Raven	*Papilio nephelus*	43	Streaked Baron	*Euthalia alpheda*
11	Red Helen	*Papilio helenus*	44	Common Map	*Curestis thyodamas*
12	Yellow Helen	*Papilio nephelus*	45	Common Maplet	*Chersonesia risa*
13	Spangle	*Papilio protenor*	46	Tabby	*Pseudergolis wedah*
14	Redbreast	*Papilio alcmenor*	47	Constable	*Dichorragia nesimachus*
15	Paris Peacock	*Papilio paris*	48	Popinjay	*Stibocheona nicea*
16	Golden Birdwing	*Troides aeacus*	49	Black Prince	*Rohana parsisatis*
17	Yellow Orange Tip	*Ixias pyrene*	50	Elusive Prince	*Rohana tonkiniana*
18	Great Orange Tip	*Hebomoia glaucippe*	51	Courtesan	*Euripus nyctelius*
19	Chocolate Albatross	*Appias lyncida*	52	Circe	*Hestina nama*
20	Orange Albatross	*Appias nero*	53	Common Jester	*Symbrenthia hippoclus*
21	Common Gull	*Cepora nerissa*	54	Grey Pansy	*Junonia atlites*
22	Lesser Gull	*Cepora nadino*	55	Orange Oakleaf	*Kallima inachus*
23	Jezebel Palmfly	*Elymnias vasudeva*	56	Cruiser	*Vindula erota*
24	Indian Sunbeam	*Curetis thetis*	57	Scarce Cat's Eye	*Coelites nothis*
25	Copper Flash	*Raphola pheretima*	58	Dark Blue Tiger	*Tirumala septentrionis*
26	Purple Sapphire	*Heliophorus epicles*	59	Plain Tiger	*Danaus chrysippus*
27	Elbowed Pierrot	*Caleta elna*	60	Striped Tiger	*Danaus genutia*
28	Common Cerulean	*Jamides celeno*	61	Leopard Lacewing	*Cethosia cyane*
29	Singleton	*Una usta*	62	Archduke	*Lexias pardalis*
30	Punchinello	*Zemeros fleggas*	63	Spot Puffin	*Appias lalage*
31	Striped Punch	*Dodona adonira*	64	Common Five Ring	*Ypthima sakra*
32	Club Beak	*Libythea myrrha*	65	Common Windmill	*Atrophaneura polyceutes*
33	Chestnut Tiger	*Parantica sita*			

Some other photos taken during the trip:

Striated Yuhina (Photo: Dr Jayati Mitra)

Olive-backed Pipit (Photo: Dr Jayati Mitra)

Buff-barred Warbler (Photo: Dr Jayati Mitra)

Elbowed Pierrot (Photo: A Surekha)

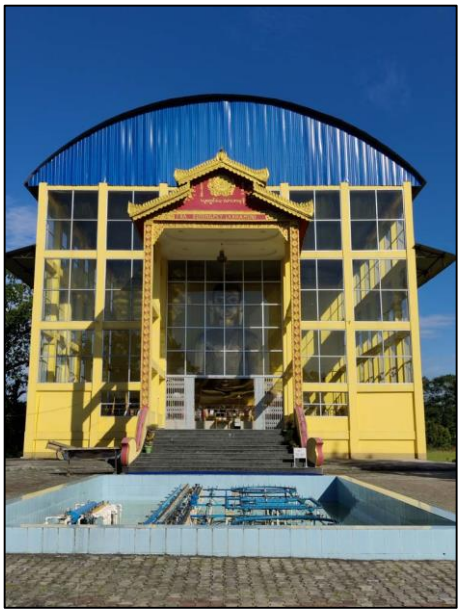
Purple Sapphire (Photo: A Surekha)

Black Prince (Photo: A Surekha)

Medus Brown (Photo: A Surekha)

Common Five-ring (Photo: A Surekha)

Scaly Laughingthrush
(Photo: Dr Jayati Mitra)



At the Golden Pagoda (Photo: A Surekha)

Clear Sailer (Photo: A Surekha)

Magpie Crow (Photo: A Surekha)

Common Bluebottle (Photo: A Surekha)

Singleton (Photo: A Surekha)

Tiger Hopper (Photo: A Surekha)

Chestnut Bob (Photo: A Surekha)

Cerulean sp (Photo: A Surekha)

Tabby (Photo: A Surekha)

Large Yeoman (Photo: A Surekha)

Persecaria sp (Photo: A Surekha)

At the Golden Pagoda premises (Photo: A Surekha)

The authors at Mayodia Pass (Photo courtesy: A Surekha)

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Citrine Wagtail (*Motacilla citreola*)

Citrine Wagtail (Chennai, March 18 & April 02, 2021)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Motacillidae
Genus: *Motacilla*
Species: *M. citreola*
Size: 17-19 cm

Description & distribution: The Citrine Wagtail, earlier known as the Yellow-headed Wagtail, is a striking member of the *Motacilla* genus of wagtails, and exhibits the characteristic behavior of constantly wagging its tail. It is a long, slender bird, with the breeding male showing a bright yellow head, grey or black nape, mantle and upperparts, and yellow underparts. The remiges and wing coverts may show some white. The non-breeding male is slightly duller, with the yellow on head looking more brownish, with a yellowish supercilium that surrounds the ear coverts to join the yellow throat, and the underparts showing yellow diluted by white. The female is generally a washed-out looking version of the non-breeding male, although some breeding females do show a yellow crown and ear coverts, and may resemble the breeding male more closely. The juvenile lacks any yellow, and has a brownish crown, ear coverts and mantle, a buffish supercilium with dark upper edge and surround to ear coverts, and buffish-white underparts with a black spotted gorget.

There are two sub-species: *M. c. calcarata* shows the black upperparts and deeper yellow underparts, while nominate *M. citreola* shows the grey mantle and upperparts with a variable black collar.

The Citrine Wagtail breeds in high-altitude wet grasslands in the central Palearctic region, including North Baluchistan and the North-western Frontier Province east through Gilgit-Baltistan, Kashmir, Ladakh, Lahaul and Spiti, between altitudes of 1500-4300m. It winters primarily in the Indian subcontinent south till about Kerala, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, but is absent in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands and in Sri Lanka. Is range seems to be expanding westwards to Europe, where it is a rare but increasing vagrant.

Habitat & behaviour: The Citrine Wagtail is usually seen in small flocks in paddyfields, marshes, wet meadows and irrigated fields, grasslands and grassy margins of lakes and tanks. It is more gregarious than the other wagtails and generally prefers to stay in close proximity to water. They are often seen on floating vegetation, lotus leaves etc, looking for tiny insects and midges that it may catch from the leaf or by making sudden sharp sallies into the air. On grass, it walks along in small mincing steps, sometimes scurrying in short spurts to catch fleeing insects. It feeds mainly on aquatic invertebrates and their larvae, although it often also takes dragonflies, butterflies, flies, beetles, spiders and small gastropods.

Its flight is the typical wagtail flight – a few quick wing flaps followed by a short pause when it may glide a few meters before flapping its wings again. Its contact call is a sharp *tzreep*, similar to, but harsher than, that of the Yellow Wagtail.

Nesting: The Citrine Wagtail breeds between May and June in most of its breeding range. The typical nest is usually a cup made of grass, placed in the middle of, or at the foot of, a tuft of coarse grass or small bush, in a marsh or on wet ground near upland streams. The usual clutch consists of 3-5 eggs, somewhat variable but generally yellowish grey or greenish, with reddish brown freckles, these being more dense at the broad end. Parental duties are shared by both parents.

Local name: The Citrine Wagtail is known as *'Pilkya'* or *'Pani ka pilkya'* in Hindi, *'Pivalya dokyacha dhobi'* in Marathi, *'Pila mathano pilakiyo'* in Gujarati, *'Pila si mamola'* in Punjabi, and *'Jal khajjan'* or *'Pitta-shirsha khajjan'* in Sanskrit.

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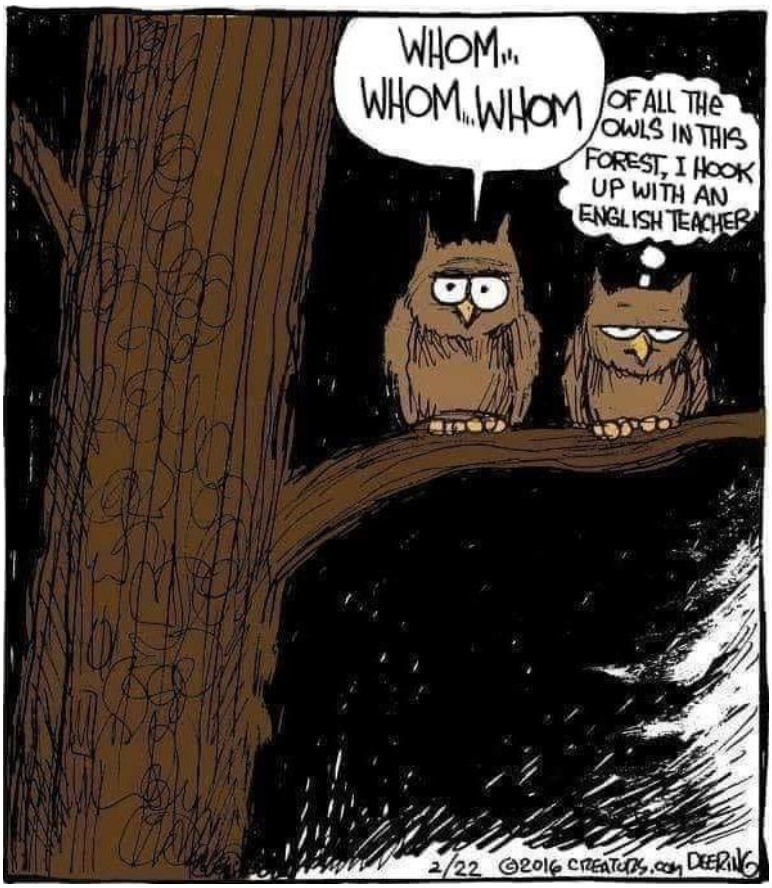
Bird Humour

Umesh Mani



(Received on WhatsApp, March 21, 2021)

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